Improving the forest cover of the country

402. PROF. SAIF-UD-DIN SOZ: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are taking any measure to improve the forest cover of the country; and

(b) whether the Ministry had taken any innovative methods to make forests richer and productive?

THE MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI T.R. BAALU): (a) Yes, Sir. The measures undertaken by Government to improve the forest cover in the country are:

(i) Afforestation Programmes are undertaken by the State Governments/UT Administrations from their own resources as well as with financial assistance from Government.

(ii) Guidelines have been issued to all States/UTs to involve village communities through Joint Forest Management in protection and regeneration of degraded forests.

(iii) Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 has been enacted to regulate diversion of forest land for non-forestry purposes.

(iv) A network of protected areas has been established.

(v) Externally aided projects are also being implemented for development and preservation of forests.

(b) Yes, Sir. The National Afforestation Programme is being implemented through an innovative two-tier mechanism—Forest Development Agencies at the Forest Division level and Joint Forest Management Committee at the village level.

Financial assistance to U.P. for increasing production of non-timber forest produce

403. SHRI LALIT SURI: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) the quantum of financial assistance provided to the State of Uttar Pradesh for increasing production of Non-Timber Forest produce including Medicinal Plants during the last three years as also for the current financial year;